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Response Paper 2 AML2410

Dorothy Parker’s *Big Blondie* is a story emanating themes of feminism in the unfortunate tale of Hazel Morse and her trivial expectations for life. The story begins with a description of the vast superficiality characterizing Mrs. Morse’s life, evident in her “couple of thousand evenings of being a good sport among her male aquaintances” (Parker 188). Following these characterizations, the increasingly morose Mrs. Morse encourages her own decline through alcohol abuse and eventually hits rock bottom with an anticlimactic botched suicide attempt involving enough sleeping pills to “kill an ox” (Parker 203). Viewed in its entirety, it is rather clear that this story does not promote the benefits of domesticity. Rather, it advances ideals of identity and ambition through the very lack thereof in Hazel Morse.

Immediately preying on Hazel’s intelligence in the first page by mentioning her incompetent memory, it is clear to the reader that Mrs. Morse is not necessarily a character to be admired. Her only real virtue, if it can be called that, is the sexual desire she evokes in men. Not once is she described as beautiful, but rather that she merely “incites men…to shake their heads roguishly” (Parker 188). Her appearance is in fact consistently tarnished by the author through particular diction in regards to her physicality. Specifically, her arms are described as “flabby” while her hands are “strange terminations” (Parker 185). Parker subtly manages to avoid invoking any sympathy for the reuben-esque female by painting a portrait of Mrs. Morse’s stupidity in the opening paragraph by citing “She prided herself upon her small feet and suffered for her vanity, boxing them in…”(Parker 185). In other words, Mrs. Morse makes the decision to endure pain for her own vanity rather than make a decision to actually benefit herself. Clearly such language encourages, or rather enforces, a negative perception of the story’s protagonist. With such an implication of negativity so prominent, it would only seem reasonable that the dim-witted and overweight former model might find herself in less than unfortunate circumstances. However, while these characterizations prove the author’s intent to discourage such a lifestyle, they do not in and of themselves provide enough momentum for Hazel’s inevitable decline. It is instead Mrs. Morse’s lack of any worthy ambition that leads to her moral, mental, and physical deterioration.

As Mrs. Morse stumbles through life she fails to establish any goals beyond the occasional foresight to purchase of a quart of whisky, which she then uses to cloud her already questionable judgment. From an outsider’s perspective, it would seem that she is chasing “one man, permanently, to pay all her bills…” but even this is mentioned in association with the women of Charlie’s and not at all in regards to herself (Parker 199). Never does Mrs. Morse specify any sort of goal of self-fulfillment beyond that of her infatuation with Scotch. This lack of identity (identity which must be built with the foundation of fulfillment) along with the money of her various suitors give her the ability to remain “misty-minded” on an everyday basis, and in turn, allow her to ruin her life right under her very nose, and not realize until it seems the burden of life (much like the burden of the horses on Sixth Avenue) becomes too much and sleeping pills represent the only way out. Mrs. Morse’s lack of direction and inability to “take the reins” of her life, slowly drown her in an overwhelming depression of indecision and absence of proactivity. While it may be said that she did marry, a traditionally active decision, she failed to even leave the apartment aside from visits to Mrs. Martin, yet alone establish any sort of self-fulfillment; and even said visits were charged with passivity as she allowed the character of Ed from Utica to kiss her as he pleased despite her status as a married woman. If Mrs. Morse’s marriage was a happy one characterized by love and an adoration for husband Herbie, it might seem reasonable, or at least understandable, that she voluntarily lets all her premarital aquaintances “drop from her life” (Parker 190). However, such is not the case, and her marriage is suspended in a constant state of emotional instability and temporary alcoholically tainted resolutions.

Without a handle on her own life, plagued by an ambiguity of direction, Mrs. Morse embodies the plight of the horses on Sixth Avenue. As Hazel Morse pulls behind her her carriage of depression, unable to control her direction bound in a harness of indecision, she is bound to eventually fall to her knees with the whip of regret scarring her back. Her memories a “blurred and flickering sequence” further disconcerted by then prohibited bourbon, Hazel Morse is not equipped with the tools necessary to improve her existence. Without ambition and without an identity, Hazel Morse even manages to fail her own suicide attempt because she couldn’t stand the idea of pain or heights (Parker 202).

By illustrating the profound effects of passivity and lack of ambition in the life of Hazel Morse, Dorothy Parker drives home significant ideals of the feminist movement, the most notable of which being identity and self-fulfillment. Without a fulfilling hobby or occupation, we as humans are doomed to mentally plummet into depths we may not be able to surface from. As Hazel sunk more and more into her glass of Scotch, her life spiraled more and more out of control until an eternal sleep was the only comfort; and yet, she was denied even this. Parker uses this story to discourage traditional ideals of the cult of domesticity in a patriarchal world. Mrs. Morse’s fallacies provide a quintessential example of all that is wrong with committed female submission to the home.